

Iowa Outdoors
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.com

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**MOUNTAIN LION/COUGAR HOAXES RUNNING RAMPANT
OVER THE INTERNET**

By Ron Andrews
Furbearer Resource Biologist
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Yes, Iowans, there have been three mountain lions/cougars killed in our state. One was road-killed in the late summer of 2001 near Harlan, one shot near Ireton in northwest Iowa in November 2003, and one shot near Chariton in south central Iowa in early 2004.

But the rumors and false stories from all corners of Iowa claim mountain lions/cougars are everywhere. These rumors rate a zero on the Fact-O-Meter. What is the status of mountain lions/ cougars in Iowa? First, there may be a few others out there, but very few compared to all the wild rumors.

Iowa mountain lions/ cougars are from two possible sources. Either captive animals kept as “pets” that have escaped or been intentionally released, or perhaps a few long distance dispersing animals from their native areas in the Black Hills of South Dakota, western Rocky Mountain States or southwest Texas. Of the many reports of mountain lion/cougar sightings that we (DNR) receive, the “lion’s share” cannot be authenticated or verified by tracks or photos or other hard evidence. For a fish and game agency to confirm reported sightings, we have to have hard evidence such as a track, photo or something concrete.

To confuse the issue further, some people are using the Internet to send mountain lion/cougar photos saying the photos are of mountain lion/cougars taken in Iowa, when in fact they have been taken elsewhere. Here is a description of the two most common photos that have been circulating the web. One is of a man holding up (bear hugging) a large, dead mountain lion/cougar in a garage. That particular cougar was killed in Washington state several years ago. But through Internet rumor and gossip circles, that animal has apparently been killed in every southern Iowa county as well as in more than a half dozen states in the mid and south central United States.

The second more recent photo shows a mountain lion/cougar following very closely behind a deer and claims to have been taken with a trail master camera near Albia, and probably several other Iowa communities as well. But taking a closer look at that photo, one can see the deer is a mule deer (black coloration on the tail) that inhabit the western United States, not Iowa, and the habitat is a fairly dense conifer stand, which is not typically found in Iowa.

Other mountain lion/cougar rumors and hoaxes indicate that the Iowa Department of Natural Resources released many of these animals to reduce the deer herd. That is absolutely untrue and ludicrous. We have enough common sense to know that politically, such a program would raise the ire of many agricultural interests in the state. **THE DNR HAS NOT, WILL NOT, AND DID NOT RELEASE MOUNTAIN LIONS/COUGARS IN IOWA.**

Also a few words of caution—don't believe everything you read and see on the Internet as a lot of it can be just flat out rumor and gossip.

For more information, contact Andrews at 641-357-3517.

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[Electronic photo available]

FALL WALLEYE FISHING AS HOT AS IT GETS

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

CLEAR LAKE--Although the weather may be a bit cool, the fall walleye fishing at Clear Lake has been just about as hot as you can get it.

"I don't think anyone will argue that this has been some of the best fall fishing in recent memory," said DNR fisheries biologist, Jim Wahl.

"I'd say that this spring and summer's walleye fishing was about average for the lake. But things really started changing during September, and the fishing just got better as the fall progressed. What started as an average year, has now become a spectacular harvest," says Wahl.

Some of the greatest walleye densities are currently associated with emergent bulrush and sand flats. Anglers are also reporting good success at Billy's Reef and from the lake's artificial weed bed located west of the downtown Sea Wall. Live bait [especially minnows] appears to be the preferred anglers' choice. Some folks, however, are still taking fish on artificial lures. The key to using artificial lures, says Wahl, is to keep the presentation slow and simple.

Although fishing has remained remarkably consistent during October, anglers still need to pay attention to weather fronts -- especially the dramatic cold ones that put predator fish off their feed and on the bottom. As always, the best walleye action will occur after at least two to three days of stable [warm] temps.

"Most of the fish we're seeing in the angler's creel will run from 14-inches to 18-inches in length," said Wahl. "These walleyes are extremely robust and everyone seems very pleased with the quality."

Biologists and anglers are hoping the walleyes will continue their feeding binge through the remainder of the month.

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DUCKS AND DEER; YOUTH HUNTERS SCORE

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Youth hunting seasons have taken hold in Iowa. Usually preceding the 'regular' season, the youth seasons allow kids the fun of the hunt, without the pressure of keeping up with the adults, or fighting lousy weather. Not every kid gets his deer, ducks or pheasants. However, the chance to get outdoors and get a little extra mentoring is priceless.

Running September 18 to October 3, the youth deer season allows kids 12 to 16 the chance to use bow, shotgun or muzzleloader to bag a buck...or a doe. Though still wary of humans, deer are a bit more predictable, a month ahead of their loopy pre-rut or peak of rut wanderings. Youth duck season, earlier this month, falls between the several days early season and the longer late season. Local ducks are still around, and some migrants show up by then, too. A week ahead of Iowa's pheasant opener, kids will be able to hunt pheasants (October 23-24).

In most years, the weather is tolerable; no biting winds or ice to break, or knee high snow. There's no pressure from hunting parties all around you, either. Overall, conditions looked good as four Solon youths hit the field earlier this fall.

Sunset Buck

Sunset approached as a few does edged into the alfalfa field. A fawn wandered close to Matt Morrison's stand. Not interested. With another week yet in Iowa's youth deer season, the 13-year-old was holding out for antlers.

Parked in a two-person tree stand west of Solon with his dad, Mark, they surveyed the playing field. In front of them, the hayfield would offer an unobstructed shot if deer traveled from the standing corn to the south. To the north was timber. "The deer seemed to be bedding in the cornfield," explained Matt. "I was in an old fence line; near the corner of the alfalfa field."

That corner was the key. "It was a funnel from the corn into the alfalfa," said Mark Morrison. "The trails led out to the field from the corner. The deer still seemed to be in their summer pattern, bachelor groups of bucks. We had sat a few times, but decided to stay later this time, right up to closing time."

It was a good plan. Just before sunset, two bucks emerged from the grassy edge of the cornfield. The six-pointer approached, about 20 yards away. A minute later, the eight-pointer walked by. "I had butterflies in my stomach," Matt admitted. "I was relieved that it came out in time (before shooting hours ended)." Offered a broadside look at 25 yards, Matt couldn't pass it up. The buck dropped right away. Matt had his buck, making up for a clean miss a week earlier, on a bigger buck, in the same field. For Matt, it wasn't his first. He dropped a smaller buck last year in his first youth season. He's taken one in Missouri with a bow and a button buck in that state's rifle season.

Mixed Bag In the Marsh

If Nick Henry, Tyler Smith and Nick Day were going to draw any ducks on this Sunday morning, it would be over their own decoy spread. The three 11-year-olds had advice from their dads, but they slogged through the knee-deep marsh before dawn, setting out decoys. "We set them in a big arc; a 'J' from left to right, in front of the boat", explained Tyler. The winds were from the southeast. A stand of willows on the south side of the marsh helped obscure their camouflaged boat.

A cold front Friday and Saturday had blown ducks south into Iowa. "We saw one group of 20," noted Tyler. "There were a fair number of wood ducks; about the same with teal," said his father, Aaron Smith. "Some wigeons and gadwall, too. Usually we wouldn't see many that early in the season."

Four wigeons locked onto the bobbing decoys. "They worked the decoys four times, tightening their circle," recalls Tyler. "The last time around, Dad said 'get ready'. Then we shot." Two birds dropped. By the time the three 11-year-olds came off the water, about 9 a.m., they also had a pair of gadwalls and two wood ducks. One of the woodies sported a band. A check showed it had been banded five weeks before just a half-mile away.

“There was plenty of other activity, too,” noted Aaron Smith. “A lot of cormorants and pelicans were flying and we could hear geese nearby. We all watched a buck and two does swim across the marsh toward us. Best of all, we weren’t surrounded by other hunters.”

And that’s the idea. Less pressure. The boys know they’ll be the ones who shoot or don’t shoot. “We got to go out for a couple hours. Each of the boys had some opportunities to shoot. If they got one, it was a bonus,” reflected Smith. As they pulled out, after three hours, a mom, dad and son were getting on the water.

The scene will be repeated late this month, during the youth pheasant season. And perhaps someday kids will be calling in gobblers a few days ahead of their parents. With or without a buck or bird at the end of the hunt, a young hunter can spend the day watching the wildlife scene unfold, something their friends will never witness, at 55 miles an hour, whizzing down the nearby highway.

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RECENT RAINS GREAT FOR FALL CONSERVATION PLANTINGS

Des Moines – This autumn is a great time for installing trees and shrubs for conservation projects thanks to recent generous rainfalls across the state.

“Adequate moisture and mild temperatures in the fall provide excellent growing conditions for bareroot conservation seedlings and containerized native trees and shrubs,” said John Walkowiak, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources’ forestry bureau.

“Fall – right up until the ground freezes – offers an extra planting season that allows landowners to get a jump on conservation efforts, whether installing a wildlife planting and riparian buffer strip to protect water ways to landscaping their yards and installing that needed windbreak,” he said.

The State Forest Nursery in Ames has more than 44 species of native trees and shrub conservation seedlings available including all native oaks and other hardwood trees to hardy conifers and wildlife enhancing shrubs such as chokecherry and plum.

“If a homeowner is thinking about landscaping their yard, local nurseries and garden centers are offering great discounts now on hardy trees and shrubs,” Walkowiak said. “To me, fall is the best time to plant trees in Iowa.”

Walkowiak said landowners should research what trees and shrubs would work best for their lands or property. That information is available on the Internet at www.iowatreeplanting.com or from the local district forester's office.

To find out more or to place an order, contact the State Forest Nursery at 1-800-865-2477 or order on line at www.iowadnr.com/forestry/.

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